

January 13, 2017
1420 East 6th Ave.
P.O. Box 200701
Helena, MT 59620-0701

Environmental Quality Council
Montana Department of Environmental Quality
Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks
Fisheries Division
Region 2 Office
Montana State Library, Helena
MT Environmental Information Center
Montana Audubon Council
Montana Wildlife Federation
Deer Lodge Valley Conservation District
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Helena
State Historic Preservation Office, Helena
Carl Johnson
Will McDowell, Clark Fork Coalition
Rick and Pam Hirsch

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Enclosed is an Environmental Assessment (EA) prepared for the Future Fisheries Improvement Program (FFIP). The Program tentatively plans to provide partial funding toward a project on Racetrack Creek, a tributary to the Clark Fork River, to replace an irrigation diversion that blocks upstream movement with a rock weir, thereby improving fish passage. The project site is located above Interstate 90 just below Yellowstone Trail, approximately 8 miles south of the community of Deer Lodge in Powell County.

Please submit any comments by 11:59 PM on February 12, 2017 to Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks at the address listed above. The funding for this project through the FFIP is contingent upon approval being granted by the Fish & Wildlife Commission. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at (406) 444-2432. Please note that this draft EA will be considered as final if no substantive comments are received by the deadline listed above.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michelle McGree", followed by a horizontal line.

Michelle McGree, Program Officer
Habitat Bureau
Fisheries Division
e-mail: mmcgree@mt.gov

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
Fisheries Division
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Racetrack Creek Johnson diversion replacement

General Purpose: The 1995 Montana Legislature enacted sections 87-1-272 through 273, MCA that direct Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) to administer a Future Fisheries Improvement Program (FFIP). The program involves providing funding for physical projects to restore degraded fish habitat in rivers and lakes for the purpose of improving wild fisheries. The legislature established an earmarked funding account to help accomplish this goal. Additionally, the 1999 Montana Legislature amended statute sections 87-1-273, 15-38-202 and Section 5, Chapter 463, Laws of 1995 to create a bull trout and cutthroat trout enhancement program. This legislation was amended again in 2013 to open the program to all native fish species (statute section 87-1-283). The program now calls for the enhancement of native fish through habitat restoration, natural reproduction and reductions in species competition by way of the FFIP.

The FFIP tentatively plans to provide partial funding toward a project that would replace an irrigation diversion that blocks upstream fish passage and entrains fish with a rock weir diversion that enhances passage. The goal is to enhance fish passage and eliminate entrainment in a high priority watershed.

I. Location of Project:

The project site is located above Interstate 90 just below Yellowstone Trail, approximately 8 miles south of the community of Deer Lodge in Powell County within Township 10N, Range 7W, Section 12.

II. Need for the Project:

One goal within FWP's Statewide Fisheries Management Plan for the fisheries management program is to "restore and enhance degraded fisheries habitats." By implementing an improvement project and restoring access to important habitat, this proposed project would help meet this goal. This project is focused on creating fish passage at an irrigation diversion that blocks movement and entrains fish. Improving connectivity opens additional habitat to fish species and allows fluvial fish to complete their migratory life histories. It will also allow fish to access new habitat that are temperature refuges and may reduce trout mortality in the hot summer months.

III. Scope of the Project:

The project proposes to install a triple rock weir diversion, with each weir crest 0.7 feet above the pool below. Rock weirs will have small spaces between the rocks to enable smaller fish species and age classes to descend the structure. A removal stop log will be installed in the top weir so that the water depth can be controlled at various flows (and ensure the water right is diverted) while also accommodating fish passage at a variety of stream flows. The overall goal is to create fish passage on Racetrack Creek while maintaining irrigation water rights.

This project is expected to cost \$37,230. Of this total, the FFIP would be contributing up to \$22,880. The remaining funds are considered matching contributions, and include:

Contributor	In-kind services	In-kind cash
Clark Fork Coalition		\$10,300
Carl Johnson, irrigator	\$3,250	
Total: \$13,550		

IV. Environmental Impact Review Checklist:

Evaluation of the impacts of the Proposed Action including secondary and cumulative impacts on the Physical and Human Environment

Project Title: Racetrack Creek Johnson diversion replacement

Division/Bureau: Fisheries Division / Habitat Bureau (FFIP)

Description of Project: The replacement of an irrigation diversion that blocks upstream fish passage and entrains fish with a rock weir diversion that enhances passage. The goal is to enhance fish passage and eliminate entrainment in a high priority watershed.

A. POTENTIAL IMPACTS TO THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Will the proposed action result in potential impacts to:	Unknown	Potentially Significant	Minor	None	Can Be Mitigated	Comments Provided
1. Geology and soil quality, stability and moisture				X		
2. Air quality or objectionable odors				X		
3. Water quality, quantity and distribution (surface or groundwater)			X			X
4. Existing water right or reservation				X		X
5. Vegetation cover, quantity and quality				X		
6. Unique, endangered, or fragile vegetative species				X		
7. Terrestrial or aquatic life and/or habitats			X			X
8. Unique, endangered, or fragile wildlife or fisheries species				X		
9. Introduction of new species into an area				X		
10. Changes to abundance or movement of species			X			X

B. POTENTIAL IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

Will the proposed action result in potential impacts to:	Unknown	Potentially Significant	Minor	None	Can Be Mitigated	Comments Provided
1. Noise and/or electrical effects				X		
2. Land use				X		
3. Risk and/or health hazards				X		
4. Community impact				X		
5. Public services/taxes/utilities				X		
6. Potential revenue and/or project maintenance costs				X		
7. Aesthetics and recreation				X		
8. Cultural and historic resources				X		X
9. Evaluation of significance				X		
10. Generate public controversy				X		

V. Explanation of Impacts to the Physical Environment

3. Water quantity, quality, and distribution.

No changes in streamflow would occur in Racetrack Creek as a result of the proposed project. Short-term increases in turbidity may occur during project construction. To minimize turbidity, operation of equipment in the stream channel will be minimized to the extent practicable. A 318 authorization will be obtained, if necessary, to meet short-term water quality standards.

4. Existing water right or reservation.

Although this project will affect a rock weir installed on an irrigation diversion to facilitate fish passage, it will not impact any existing water rights or reservations.

7. Terrestrial or aquatic life and/or habitats.

This project would replace a non-functional irrigation diversion with a series of rock weirs and a removable stop log to better facilitate irrigation withdrawals and fish passage. Long-term, this project should increase aquatic and riparian habitats by connecting stream reaches that are used by Brown Trout, Mountain Whitefish, Westslope Cutthroat Trout, Longnose Sucker, and Slimy Sculpin.

10. Changes to abundance or movement of species.

The rock weirs should increase stream connectivity by repairing an obstruction to fish passage. Unobstructed movement in this section of Racetrack Creek is expected to open additional habitat and provide refuge areas during periods of high temperature. The result is expected to increase habitat availability and allow migratory species to complete their life histories, which is likely to increase abundance and survival of fish in Racetrack Creek.

VI. Explanation of Impacts to the Human Environment

8. Cultural and historic resources.

No cultural or historical resource impacts are anticipated. However, the State Historical Preservation Office will be notified of the project, and any potential concerns will be addressed.

VII. Narrative Evaluation and Comment.

There are no anticipated cumulative effects.

VIII. Discussion and Evaluation of Reasonable Alternatives.

1. No Action Alternative.

If no funding is provided through the FFIP, either the applicant would have to seek additional sources of funding to complete the project, or the affected area of Racetrack Creek would continue to block upstream passage and entrain fish.

2. The Proposed Alternative.

The proposed alternative intends to provide partial funding through the FFIP to restore fish passage at Racetrack Creek.

IX. Environmental Assessment Conclusion Section.

1. Other groups or agencies contacted or which may have overlapping jurisdiction:

Deer Lodge Valley Conservation District

2. Evaluation and listing of mitigation, stipulation, or other control measures enforceable by the agency or another government agency:

None.

3. Is an EIS required?

No. We conclude, from this review, that the proposed activities will have an overall positive

impact on the physical and human environment, and will therefore not require the extensive analysis associated with an EIS.

4. Level of public involvement.

The project application to the FFIP has been posted on the FWP webpage for public comment. No comments have been received to date. The proposed project was reviewed and supported by the public review panel of the FFIP. The proposed project also will be reviewed by the Fish & Wildlife Commission, and funding will be contingent upon their approval. The EA will be distributed to all individuals and groups listed on the cover letter and will be published on the FWP webpage: www.fwp.mt.gov.

5. Duration of comment period?

Public comment will be accepted through 11:59 PM on February 12, 2017.

6. Person(s) responsible for preparing the EA.

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Helena, MT 59620
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Contributor: Will McDowell, Clark Fork Coalition

FIGURE 1: project location

